

## How to Develop a Healthy Perspective

Everyone experiences problems from time to time. But the way in which people respond to their troubles can vary greatly. Take the example of two drivers, each of whom gets a flat tire on the way to work. The first motorist's whole day is ruined. He mumbles about his rotten luck for hours, spreading blame wherever he can and accomplishing little at work. The other driver, however, treats the flat tire as a minor inconvenience. He has it repaired and quickly moves on, proceeding to have a productive day.

Each encountered the exact same problem. So, why did one driver get so upset while the other handled the situation with ease? What distinguishes them is their **perspective**.

The dictionary defines perspective as "the capacity to view things in their true relation or relative importance." Think about the people you know. Do you have any friends or coworkers who continually dwell on petty nonsense, such as who has the larger office window? And how about those who sever ties with close family members because of a dispute over the seating arrangements at a wedding? It's clear that these individuals have lost sight of the "relative importance" of things!

Too many people blow their problems way out of proportion, devoting precious mental energy to situations which do not carry "life or death" consequences. Virtually all of us will fall into this trap on occasion, but those who spend the least amount of time obsessing on trivial circumstances are likely to accomplish far more -- and be happier in the process!

The question, then, becomes: how can we develop more perspective? Well, one surefire way is through encountering and overcoming adversity. If, for example, you're faced with a life-threatening illness, poor service in a restaurant will no longer seem very crucial.

Fortunately, you don't have to wait for a major catastrophe in order to gain perspective. Here are some suggestions to broaden your outlook that you can implement right away:

1. **Look at your problem in the context of your entire life.** Ask yourself: How important is this difficulty in the overall scheme of things? What will this matter ten years from now? Okay, so you have a leak in your bathroom. It probably won't affect the rest of your life. Or, let's say a sale falls through. Sure, you're disappointed, but it isn't the end of the world. The key is to see the problem for what it is and not let it dominate your thinking for an entire day, week or month.

2. **Wake up to the miracles all around you.** You are part of an extraordinary universe. Spectacular things are happening every second. For instance, you breathe, your heart beats and you digest food all without any conscious effort. Tulips pop through the ground at precisely the right time each year. The earth rotates ... the sun rises and sets ... the seasons change. All part of a wondrous, never ending cycle. So, shake your ho hum attitude and begin to appreciate the amazing universe you're part of!
3. **Extend yourself to others.** We tend to get mired in our own problems, turning inward and growing depressed and frustrated. Finding ways to serve and help others will make you feel better and broaden your understanding of the interconnectedness of all human beings. Even something as simple as offering a few encouraging words to someone else can make a world of difference -- to them and to you.
4. **Interact on a regular basis with those facing serious challenges.** For example, volunteer each week in a local hospital and spend time with those who are ill. Or, donate your time serving meals in a soup kitchen. In either case, you'll be helping others while learning just how well off you are!
5. **Redirect your focus to the many blessings in your life.** Are you in reasonably good health? Do you have your eyesight and mobility? Is there a roof over your head and enough food in the refrigerator? There are many people who don't enjoy these gifts and who would gladly trade places with you. So, focus on the many things for which you are grateful. To reinforce this idea, take the back of an index card and write "Count Your Blessings" or "I have so much to be grateful for." Place the card where you'll frequently see it, such as on your desk or in your car.
6. **Be around people who have a healthy outlook.** We are all influenced by the company we keep. Therefore, try to spend more time with people -- be they friends, relatives or coworkers -- who seem to put things in perspective. These individuals rarely complain, can easily distinguish between what's important and what's not, and are a joy to be around.

7. **View every problem as an opportunity for growth.** Too often, we see our difficulties as negative experiences which are there to punish us and cause pain. As you look back on your life, though, you'll find that many problems and painful situations led to personal growth and improved conditions. Maybe you lost a job which in turn led you to a better position. Or a relationship ended but you wound up in a more fulfilling one. So, develop a strong belief that the "bad" experience is there to help you in some way. Don't curse your challenge; instead, look for the lessons or opportunities that your problems are showing you.
8. **Watch your mouth!** Do you frequently whine and complain ... or broadcast your ailments and minor irritations to everyone who crosses your path? Gripping reinforces your problems, makes you feel more miserable and alienates others. Find something positive in your life -- or in the other person's life -- to talk about instead.
9. **Cultivate your spiritual connection.** I have found that the vast majority of people with healthy perspectives possess strong spiritual beliefs. Without belief in a Higher Power, much of life appears cruel and without purpose. As you tune into your spiritual nature, you gain a sense of purpose, receive more intuitive guidance and are able to see the reasons behind the patterns in your life.
10. **Every day, read literature which expands your perspective.** It might be a spiritual book or stories of people who have overcome tremendous obstacles. Keep reading whatever builds faith, love and strength for you. The key is daily repetition.
11. **Put yourself in physical surroundings where you can "get away" from everyday stress.** Changing your environment can give you a fresh point of view. Maybe you like to sit on the beach or take a walk in the woods. Find scenery that allows you to release tension and think creatively ... and go there as much as possible.
12. **Exercise.** Aside from the physical benefits to our bodies, exercise provides release from stress and clears our thinking. After a tough day, exercise does wonders to get your mind off your problems and helps you to handle stress as it occurs thereafter.

**13. Lighten up and laugh.** We take ourselves and our activities far too seriously. Find the humor in everyday situations and, most importantly, be willing to laugh at yourself. The very act of smiling and laughing makes us feel better physically and reduces tension.

**14. Simplify your life and restore balance.** Sometimes, we get overextended, taking on too many responsibilities or projects. We ignore loved ones and even our own health. So, maybe it's time to say "NO" to the next project or demand on your time. Which is really more important -- another volunteer committee assignment or spending time with your loved ones?

As you gain perspective, you'll find that your list of what is truly important will continue to narrow. When we mature, we tend to develop a broader outlook; yet there will be times when we become preoccupied with our difficulties and fail to see the larger issues. Therefore, we must constantly work at it.

Yes, maintaining perspective requires discipline. But the benefits -- less tension, increased productivity, greater peace of mind and more -- are well worth the effort!

-- Jeff Keller © Attitude is Everything, Inc